

FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: June 14, 2018

Agenda Item: Threemile WMA Forest Habitat Restoration – Phase 2 (R2)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

FWP proposes to implement a second forest management/habitat restoration plan for the Threemile WMA, east of Florence, in Ravalli County. During winter 2016-2017, FWP implemented Phase I of this plan, involving a pilot treatment to thin 372 timbered acres for improved understory forage production for wildlife, conifer expansion in meadows, release of aspen stands, and reduced risk of wildfire/beetle infestation. The current proposal would treat approximately 1,600 acres with similar habitat goals, using commercial and non-commercial understory thinning, and prescribed burning. This project would also include improvements and potential relocation of existing roads and bridges that would improve hunter access and reduce annual road maintenance expenses. FWP plans to build on existing partnerships with the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation and the U.S. Forest Service to accomplish project goals, as well as exercise Good Neighbor Authority to treat two small Bitterroot National Forest parcels located within the WMA.

Public Involvement Process & Results

Upon endorsement by the Commission, FWP would prepare a draft environmental assessment for public review. FWP would incorporate public input into a final environmental assessment and a recommendation for the Commission later this year.

Alternatives and Analysis

No action would allow conifers to continue expanding and increasing in density on the WMA, reducing understory and herbaceous vegetation for wildlife while increasing the susceptibility to a stand replacement fire.

FWP could consider a smaller action, involving fewer acres, but because of the success of Phase 1—a demonstration that was largely viewed as successful by FWP and the public—a larger-scale habitat restoration project would be timely, more efficient, and more effective at accomplishing habitat goals.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends Commission endorsement of this proposal. The department intends to develop a more detailed proposal and conduct public involvement to continue managing the forest on Threemile WMA. It is worth noting that a small wildfire caused by illegal exploding targets occurred in August 2014 in the section of the WMA that was treated two years later in Phase I. It is important for the management of wildlife habitat that the fire severity be managed, to the extent possible, with a proactive prescription.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission endorse this proposed forest habitat restoration project on Threemile WMA, allowing FWP to conduct further analysis and associated public review.